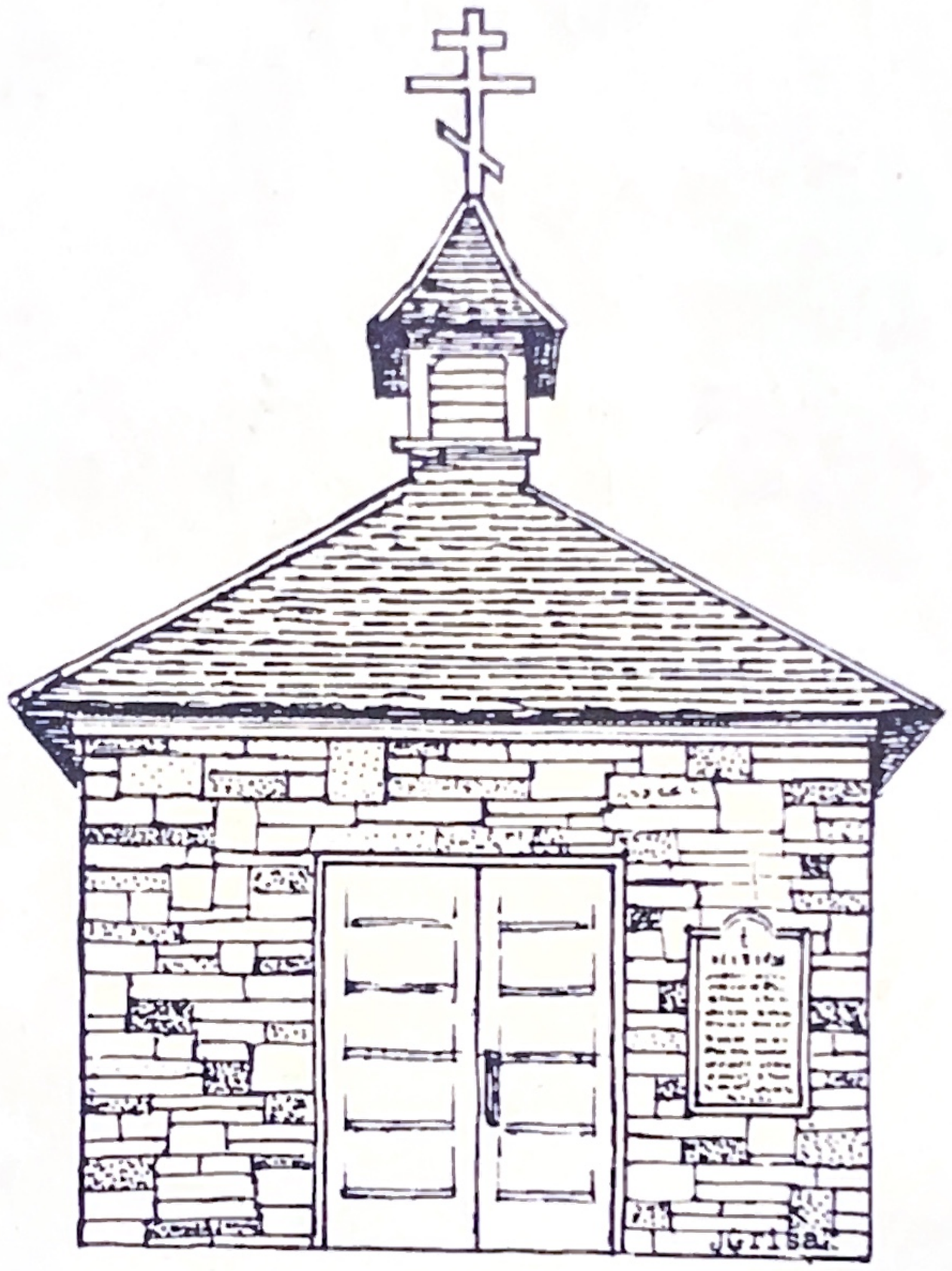
THE CEMETERY OF

ST. MARY'S EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH
(The Protection of the Virgin Mary)
Gary, Indiana



A Translation by Michael J. Grisak of
"Russian Orthodox Cemetery in Gary" (1919-1987)
From NA NIVE BOZIEJ (In God's Field)
By Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, 1931

return to
Olga Diachuk Atyhow

MEMORIAL PLAQUE (See page 6.)

PREFACE

This history of St. Mary's Eastern Orthodox Church Cemetery, beginning with the initial foresight of the original benefactors in June 1919, to September 1986, is prepared to coincide with the 75th anniversary of our St. Mary's Church in Gary, Indiana.

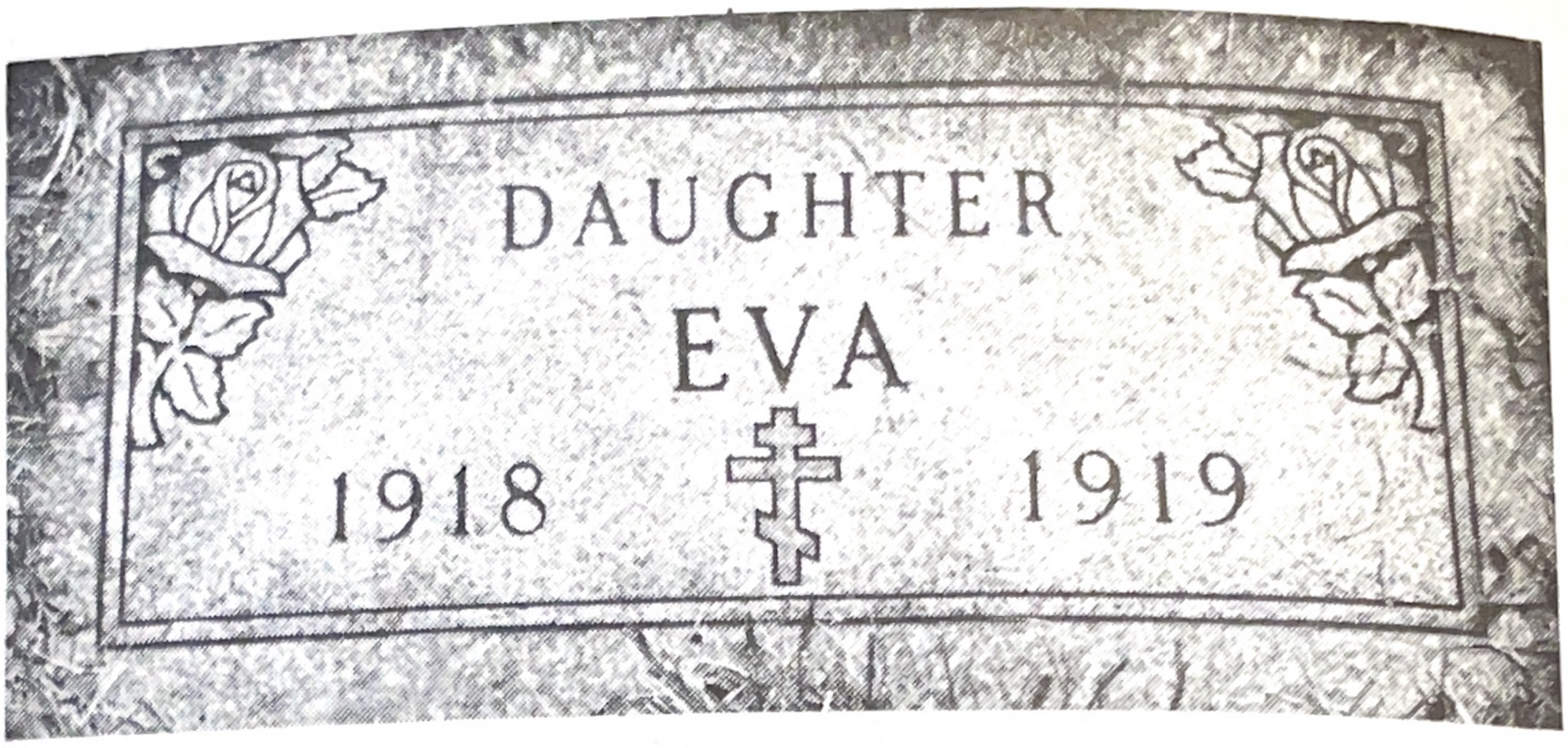
On the 20th anniversary of St. Mary's Church (1911-1931) the serving pastor, Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, published his works entitled NA NIVE BOZIEJ (In God's Field). This publication chronologically enumerated the progress of the Church from the very beginning of the parish formation to the celebration of its 20th anniversary.

Among the chapters in this book is the one entitled, "Russian Orthodox Cemetery in Gary - 1919-1927." The early historical account of our cemetery is based primarily on translation (from Russian) of this chapter enumerating the progress of events leading to the acquisition of the cemetery. Following the transfer of title from the original shareholders (chartered as "St. Mary's Russian Orthodox Ridge Road Association") to the St. Mary's Church, events are recorded, primarily based on memory, and participation in the work by many individuals for which we are grateful.

It is well to point out certain interesting statistical facts -- approximately 800 permits for removal and burial have been issued as required by the Indiana State Board of Health; capacity for future burials is projected well beyond the middle of the 21st century; the first burial permit was dated October 23, 1919, for the internment of Eva Lescisin, youthful daughter of church founders Thomas and Mary Lescisin; two Russian Orthodox pastors (Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, November 29, 1968; and V. Rev. Basil Barany, March 27, 1965) are at rest in St. Mary's Cemetery; the oldest person (by date of birth) is Haratina Pysh born in 1847; resting in the cemetery are personnel who served in the military beginning with World War I; names inscribed on the memorial plaque enshrined on the memorial plaque enshrined in the chapel and reposing are: Michael Frentzko, Vasil Misko, Daniel Krochta, Simeon Pysh, John Hortik, Nicholas Huminsky, Andrew Pillar, Peter Cidylo, and Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, who was placed to rest in November of 1968.

The present personnel administering the cemetery indicate that the business affairs are now financially self-sustaining.

MJGrisak, 1987



FIRST BURIAL, 1919

OUR FIRST PASTOR (Laid to rest, 1968)

SAINT MARY'S EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH CEMETERY

It is considered an inborn and natural tradition from time immemorial for devout Orthodox (Russian) Christians to consider the cemetery as sacred ground. In fact, a cemetery is considered an extension of the Church and parish community itself. This final resting place of departed kin, and adherents to the faith who faithfully carried on their obligations to the Church, this sacred ground carries the obligation to willingly administer to its needs, and to properly maintain its upkeep comparable to the Church itself.

Many customs and practices, varying from village to village, centering around burial of the deceased were brought to America by the early immigrants and adhered to religiously in the early days. Prior to the present-day mortuaries, caskets in our ancestral villages were prepared by designated craftsmen as required; the body of the deceased remained in the home where menfolks alternated in reading the Book of Psalms; upon departure from the home to the church, the casket was thrice reverently lowered and raised touching the doorstep; and, family participation in closing of graves was the final gesture before leaving the burial grounds.

In these ancestral parishes, several times a year, depending on the distance from the village or city, and more especially on feast days when the deceased are remembered in prayers, requiem services (Panihida) were conducted at the cemetery. During these memorial services it was not unusual to bear witness to scenes of a daughter grieving, lying prostrate, on the grave of her mother, as her lips moved in silent prayer.

At our ancestral burial grounds it was also in times of joy as well as during periods of mourning, children would visit graves of their parents believing their father and mother are listening to the prayers of the orphan children they left behind. Also, during the Easter holidays, it was considered a personal obligation to pay a visit to the grave site of blood relatives to place an Easter Egg (Pisanka) on the grave and exclaim that familiar greeting known only to Orthodox Christians: "Christos Voskres" (Christ is Risen!).

In America also, following an ancestral custom, when a new parish has been established, and following the building of a church for the living, consideration is immediately given to the burial of the deceased -- to arrange for a burial location -- a cemetery. In our Gary (Indiana) St. Mary's parish the devout founders were constantly mindful of the necessity to provide a final resting place for their deceased. However, lack of finances delayed this traditional undertaking for several years.

ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

OF

ST. MARY'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX
RIDGE ROAD CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

State of Indiana
Lake County } ss. No.....

RECEIVED FOR RECORD

This.....day of.....A. D. 19.....at.....o'clock.....M.
and recorded in Record.....
Page.....

.....
Recorder Lake County

FILED

JUN 30 1919

.....
Auditor

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and seals, this 25th day of June, 1919.

Mike Frentzko (Seal)

Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky (Seal)

William Misko (Seal)

Sam Pysh (Seal)

STATE OF INDIANA, County of Lake, ss:

During the interim period (1911-1919) the deceased of the church were laid to rest in several area cemeteries most convenient to the family, as the occasion arose. The deep concern with the pending needs of a church cemetery was becoming more and more a reality during the year 1919, following World War I, and the Spanish Influenza epidemic coinciding with the Great War. The first step toward the solution of this problem was taken by the following parishioners stemming from informal conversations: Vasil Misko, Michael Frentzko, Peter Cidylo, Andrew Pillar, Daniel Krochta, and Michael Sawocka. At the outset, this group concentrated on developing ways and means to finance the project. Inasmuch as it was quite evident the church by itself was in no financial position to undertake the purchase of land for a cemetery, it was decided to finance the project through shareholder subscriptions, with the church ultimately acquiring the shares as finances became available over a period of time until the land became church property.

On June 17, 1919, the first formal meeting was held and the wheels of progress were set into motion -- the name of a new corporation agreed upon was: "St. Mary's Russian Orthodox Ridge Road Cemetery Association." Bylaws were adopted; and it was agreed to apply for a charter from the State of Indiana. The following officers were elected: President, Vasil Misko; Vice President, Peter Cidylo; Secretary, Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky; Assistant Secretary, Nicholas Huminsky; Treasurer, Simeon Pysh; Controllers, Michael Frentzko, Michael Sawocka, and Andrew Pillar.

The "Articles of Association" were dated June 25, 1919, and signed by the following incorporating members: Mike Frentzko, Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, William Misko, and Sam Pysh. The amount of Capital Stock of the "Association" was $10,000, divided into 100 Shares, each of $100.00 value.

Resulting from the initial subscription of shares, $4,900 was realized as follows: $500 from the Church, Vasil Misko, Michael Frentzko, Simeon Pysh, V. Sadovnik, Andrew Pillar, and Vasil Truchan; $300 from Nicholas Huminsky, Peter Cidylo, Daniel Krochta; $200 from John Hortik; $100 from Matthew Volnjak, Michael Sawocka, and John Lopich. Following this initial subscription, some shares were purchased and others were redeemed.

Once the financing was arranged, immediately another meeting was held and it was voted to purchase seven (7) acres of suitable land for $2,500 on west Ridge Road. This site was especially appealing for a cemetery due to its desirable elevation precluding any future flooding of graves. The purchase was made from Maurice and Rossa Ceplair, husband and wife, located in the Northeast quarter of Section twenty-five (25), Calumet Township, Lake County, Indiana.

Inasmuch as there was a bungalo located on the land, the first reaction was to initiate capital improvements to the structure situated in the northeast corner, apparently to serve as custodial living quarters, but this plan was abandoned, apparently due to cost of remodeling, etc., and the building was removed at a later date. It was also voted to erect a traditional chapel to be located in the center with a towering Russian Orthodox cross, and equipped with a bell; enclose the frontage with a suitable fence; purchase a corporate seal; print share certificates; and maintain suitable records.

As developments dictated for further action, more meetings were held -- one on June 28, immediately followed by another meeting on June 30, resulting in action taken to grade the existing sand dunes to make it suitable for burial grounds with a roadway leading to the chapel; to arrange for water supply by installing a basin equipped with a suitable pump; following the grading, immediately to have the land surveyed for lots and graves; and to resolve minor pending problems as they surfaced. This work was carried on through the balance of the summer extending into early fall.

As the land was prepared and made suitable for burial needs as a cemetery, the fencing installed to enclose the frontage facing Ridge Road, and a beautiful red brick chapel erected with a towering white Russian Orthodox cross dominating the center of the cemetery, bearing witness to the efforts of many concerned and devout individuals, the time was at hand to consecrate the entire project -- to set it apart as sacred burial land. All of this work amounted to about $8,000. The balance beyond the share subscriptions was financed through a mortgage to one devout parishioner and president of the "Association" Vasil Misko who volunteered to come to the rescue.

This solemn and long expected happy event of consecration, one that filled every heart with a sense of accomplishment, took place on Sunday, October 19, 1919, with the following clergy participating: Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, Rev. P. Tkach, Rev. P. Stijacich (Serbian). Also participating at this consecration was the pastor of SS Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, located at 13th Avenue and Jackson Street in Gary, with many of his devout parishioners, bearing witness to this historic event. In addition to our many parishioners participating, sharing the happy event was a delegation from St. Nicholas Church in Hammond, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost Church in East Chicago. The cemetery chapel was consecrated in honor of the "Assumption of the Holy Virgin."

During the interim period of time from the day the land was purchased and to the end of 1927, the shareholders faithfully administered to the many needs and also to the routine maintenance of the grounds. In the year 1927, developments in the immediate area were such that on both sides (east and west) of our property a new large and beautiful cemetery came into existence being divided by our burial grounds. In view of this separation, the owners of this new cemetery voluntarily approached our shareholders to acquire the rear three-and-a-half (3½) acres thus connecting their present holdings. Since this proposal was very attractive to our shareholders, they readily agreed to sell for the sum of $5,000.

In view of this generous proposal, and to decide also on the future course of action relative to the cemetery, a special meeting of the shareholders took place on Thursday, December 22, 1927. In order that all those living at the time and their descendants may know and remember names of their cemetery benefactors, good and devout Orthodox Christians, and Russian patriots, who participated in this historical meeting, who were deeply concerned about the welfare of the Church and its parishioners, the following is a transcript of the minutes revealing the action taken transfering the cemetery to become the property of the Church:

ST. MARY'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX
RIDGE ROAD CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Meeting, Thursday, December 22, 1927

The meeting was held in the Parish School, 17th Avenue and Fillmore Street, Gary, Indiana. President Vasil Misko called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. All current shareholders of the cemetery property were present.

The president informed the assembly that the shareholders agreed to sell three and a half (3½) acres of the cemetery property for $5,000; and that the time is at hand to resolve what course of action must be taken with the money, and also the cemetery.

It was unanimously agreed each shareholder be reimbursed $100.00 for each share; release all future claims to the cemetery to the Holy Virgin Protection Russian Orthodox Church in the City of Gary; and, each shareholder to retain title to eight choice lots of ground.

SIGNED: Rt. Rev. B. Kedrovsky (for the Church)

Vasil Misko	Nicholas Huminsky	Peter Cidylo
John Hortik	Daniel Krochta	Ann Frentzko

Inasmuch as in the year 1927 the Christmas Holiday (December 25) fell on a Sunday -- three days after the historic meeting of the cemetery shareholders -- the big and happy news was announced to the entire congregation at the conclusion of Divine Liturgy revealing the St. Mary's Russian Orthodox Ridge Road Cemetery was donated to the Church through agreement with shareholders.

Simultaneously, a pledge was made that as long as a Russian Orthodox parish existed in Gary, on the 25th day of December, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated for the health of the living donors and "Memory Eternal" for the deceased who so generously donated the cemetery to the Church. In his sincere words of gratitude, the pastor Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kedrovsky, equated this donation with the Biblical account of the three Wise Men presenting gifts to the infant Jesus -- "There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem . . . . they fell down and worshipped Him . . . . and when they opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Having heard these "glad tidings" the reaction of the parishioners was overwhelming, creating an atmosphere of deep gratitude for the generous donation of the cemetery to the Church. In fact, this gratitude caried over and was further manifested at the annual parish meeting on January 15, 1928. The following is an excerpt recorded in the minutes of this meeting: "It was unanimously voted to immortalize the names of the cemetery donors on a marble plaque, and have it permanently mounted on the cemetery chapel." In view of this historic action, the marble plaque was ordered and inscribed below the Russian Orthodox cross centered at the top, as follows:

Compensate, Heavenly Father, with your mercy the Christian donors of this cemetery to the Russian Orthodox Church in Gary, Indiana.

May there be a prayerful Memory Eternal to these good benefactors:

Vasil Misko
Daniel Krochta
Michael Frentzko
Simeon Pysh
John Hortik
Nicholas Huminsky
John Oleksa
Andrew Pillar
Peter Cidylo

Rt. Rev. B. Kedrovsky, Pastor
25 December, 1927

On Sunday, August 5, 1928, the memorial marble plaque, adorned with beautiful flowers, was displayed in the center of the church for consecration with the donors of the cemetery standing on both sides of the display holding lighted candles. Following the consecration, a Molieben service was conducted for the health of the living donors, and followed by the chanting of "Memory Eternal" for Michael Frentzko, the deceased donor.

At the conclusion of the services, the pastor delivered the following words of gratitude to the assembled donors on behalf of the Church enumerating what it meant to the congregation and to the individuals:

"My heart has been longing to express to you these words of gratitude, but I know it is not my humble words that merit your reward. The Lord himself will proclaim your deeds in His triumphal heavenly church, and clothe you with eternal glory for donating this spot of land where the bodies of our Orthodox Christians will rest in peace.

"Relative to that historical meeting on December 22, it was revealed that nobody from the parishioners knew a few individuals got together, not with words but with deeds, to express their love towards their church. That evening will remain forever in my mind, and my love for those donors who created this noble deed will be with me to the end of my life.

"This marble plaque displayed so beautifully before us may be of natural material, and by itself it is a cold piece of stone. However, on this cold marble are engraved your names, and in the words of Apostle Peter you can be labeled 'Living Stones.' Your names are not only inscribed on marble; they are written in our hearts - to be read forever, and remembered in prayerful gratitude.

"It is apparent to me, the years will pass by and the Good Lord will, in time, summon you to Himself. Your son or your daughter will read your name on this plaque and their hearts will be filled with pride and joy. And, many more years will pass, and your grandchildren will read the inscription and say: 'This is my grandfather. . . .'

"It is not on a marble stone that your name appears, but the merciful Lord writes your name in the 'Book of Life.' And, you will hear from Him: 'Come and seek ye the Kingdom,' not that you have not sinned, but because your sins have been washed away by your generous contribution."

Following the religious services in the church, the parishioners and cemetery donors -- the honored guests -- retired to the church school where another ceremonial drama took center stage. At this assembly, in the presence of the entire parish, was the official transfer of title from the cemetery association to the church. Likewise, at this historic moment, parishioner Attorney Stephanovich Parfenoff, on behalf of the church, rendered an emotional and stirring acceptance message in which he expressed gratitude to each donor individually. This stirring message was followed by expression of gratitude by several other members of the parish.

At the conclusion, when the cemetery donors filed out of the church school, they were overtaken by complete surprise - they were greeted by the church orchestra, under the direction of Andrew P. Glagolev, filling the atmosphere with strains of lively, and appropriate for the occasion, selections (marches and toast music), as they directed their steps to the parish home where an elaborate dinner was served compliments of the parish. The newly consecrated and inscribed marble plaque, in due time, was permanently enshrined in the cemetery chapel for posterity where it can be viewed to this very day.

Following the transfer of title from the cemetery association to become church property, the financial aspect revealed an excess balance of $1,149.25. To this amount the church added $550.75 from its treasury, and further improvements were made to our burial grounds -- hauling in black dirt to blanket the sandy surfaces, extending the roadway from the chapel to the rear of the cemetery, etc. Thus, thanks to the many responsible good souls, true followers of Christ, and zealous Russian patriots, our church was now in possession of its own cemetery, a very rare accomplishment in this area for an individual church parish. In view of the fact that our property is nestled between two large burial grounds that beautify the entire area, and is situated in a choice location on an elevation that precludes any problems from flooding, it is logical to assume that our property had been greatly enhanced in value.

End of translation by --
Michael J. Grisack, 1987

cemetery
another
e entire
hurch.
off, on
ge in
was

ool,
or-
th
st
r

With the passing of time, as more and more of our parishioners were being laid to rest on their own consecrated burial ground, a multiplicity of ideas and pratices in decoration, mainly in the upkeep and maintenance of individual family lots and graves, began to surface. Apparently, stemming from practices prevailing in ancestral cemeteries, curbings were being utilized to designate ownership. Inasmuch as these lines of demarcation, placed at irregular elevations, did not lend themselves to using modern maintenance equipment, steps had to be taken to eliminate this practice, and to bring our cemetery in conformity with the two neighboring burial grounds.

In recognition of eliminating this undesirable practice, in the early fifties and extending over a period of several years, action was taken to gradually make improvements. The original surveyor's map was found inadequate, and the long overdue job began with having the cemetery re-surveyed. Appropriate markers were purchased and spotted after all the curbings were removed; the roadway to the chapel was widened and repaved, thus reducing the incline and making it more compatible to the increase in traffic, allowing parking on the grounds. An iron gate was installed at the entrance to eliminate trespassers.

After the cemetery was finally in a suitable condition for maintenance and upkeep with modern equipment, another project got under way -- the chapel was beginning to show deterioration due to age and exposure to the elements. This project included repairs to the chapel with an application of permastone facing covering the original red bricks. The financing for this latest project was made entirely through voluntary donations.

Lest we forget, it is well to enumerate the many blessings stemming from all our individual and combined efforts, beginning with the foresight of the original benefactors, to the conclusion of 75 years of labor in God's Field. We have the comforting thought that our church has its own consecrated Orthodox burial grounds; we have a place where every soul is greeted to the solemn sounds of the chapel bell; we have a place where from the very early days multitudes attend Divine Liturgy, served on the burial grounds in our private chapel as America celebrates Memorial Day; and we have a place where individual graveside services are an established tradition on the one day set aside for prayerful remembrance of our deceased.

As the years go by with the passing of time, parishioners leave the area and names of their deceased gradually fade from memory, but the family fulfills their last request for the remains to be placed among those with whom they formerly labored in God's field. It is comforting to know that the Church faithfully continues its obligation and recites prayers for all the departed.

Finally, it is especially comforting to the living that we have a private consecrated 'family' location where these immortal words will continue to be chanted over the graves of our beloved who once labored with us: "Vechnaya Pamyat, i Blazheniy Pokoy" (Memory Eternal, and Blessed Rest). For all this we are thankful to the merciful Lord as our first 75 years of labor in "God's Field" fade from memory into the shadows of time.

As we face the hurry and demands of each day and look to the future, let us always be mindful of our Christian obligation that it is is the duty of the living to remember those who have returned to their heavenly reward and repose in our 'family' plot.

MJGrisak, 1987

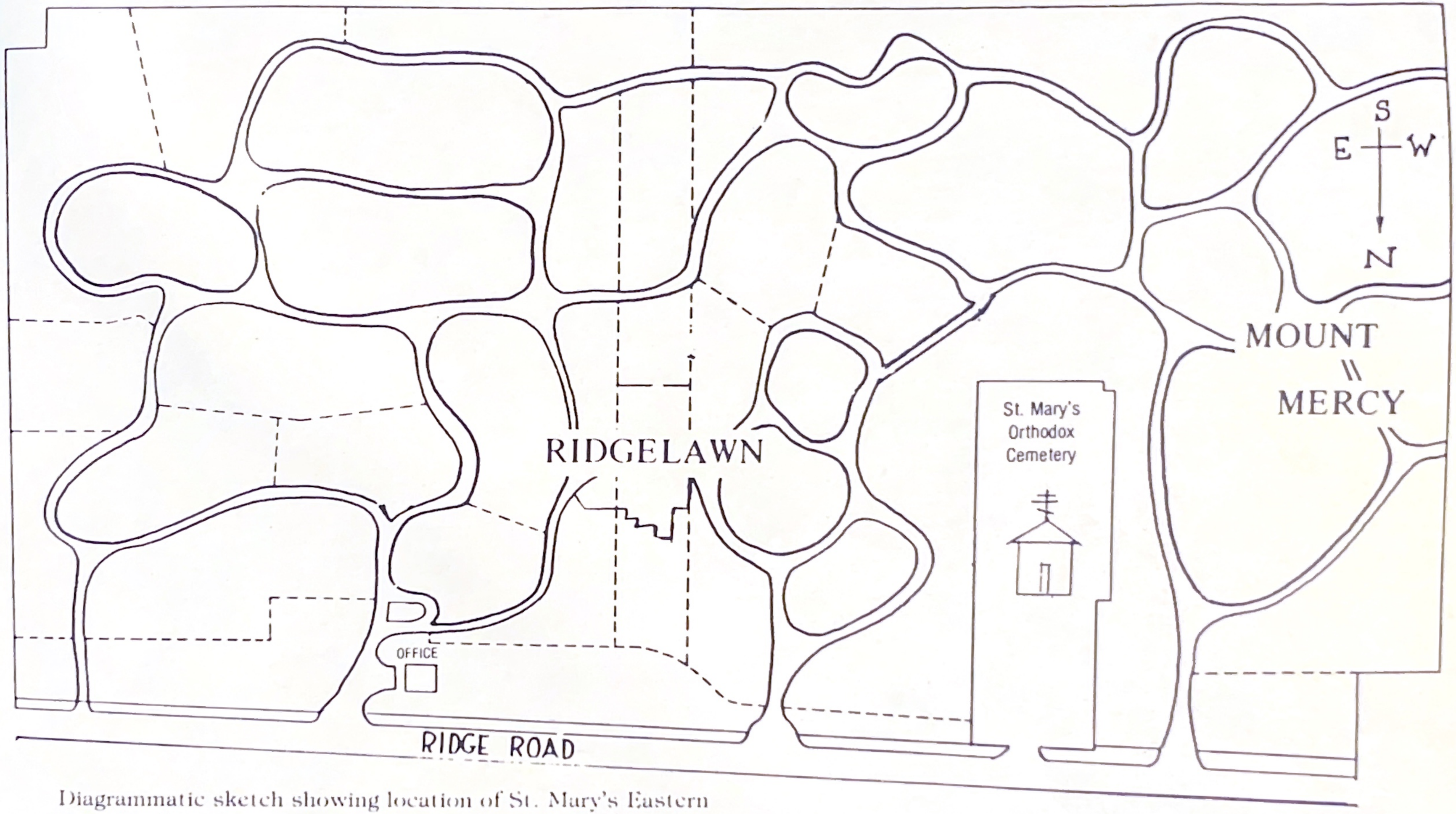
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Translated and Edited by --
Michael J. Grisak

Graphics and Printing by --
Olive and Sonia Leskow

Cover Design by John N. Grisak
Akron, Ohio

Financial Assistance by --
Stilinovich & Wiatrolik
Funeral Directors



Diagrammatic sketch showing location of St. Mary's Eastern Orthodox Cemetery on west Ridge Road in Calumet Township Lake County, Indiana

This engraving on the front of the chapel at our cemetery was painstakingly darkened, letter by letter by two devoted parishioners-- Kathryn and William Harbison, who recently departed (3-4 years ago)

(COMMENT INSERTED LATER:
They passed away in 2023 and 2024, respectively)

The translation from Russian to English can be found in this booklet on Page 6!

(please return all this to Olga)

IMAGE TAKEN IN 2026